Analysis of The World is Too Much With Us

The poem “The World Is Too Much With Us” by William Wordsworth is a criticism of society during his time. Wordsworth condemns people for being too materialistic and obsessed with money and states that they are out of touch with divinity, and more importantly, nature. Wordsworth himself is the speaker in the poem and his audience is society, particularly his fellow Englishmen. It is written in the first point of view as Wordsworth is admonishing society for its flaws. His main argument is that people are too concerned with the manmade and cannot relate to nature anymore.

Written partially as a response to the Industrial Revolution and Enlightenment, Wordsworth writes this out of a place of disgust and frustration. He takes a very critical tone, as he is angry and upset at the world around him. However, there is a shift in tone after the first octave at line 9. The first part of the poem, the octave, presents the problem, or the criticism, while the following sestet provides Wordsworth’s personal solution to the problem. His dramatic, and outrageous, solution, to the problem of being out of tune with nature, is to become a Pagan and delight in the gods of Proteus and Triton.

The poem is laced with imagery, and mostly appeals to the visual aspect of our senses. One of the best examples is “the sea that bares her bosom to the moon” (1107.5). This depicts the lovely image of the sea with the moon gazing on it. There is also the image of Proteus “rising from the sea” (line 14) and Triton “blowing his wreathed horn” (1107.15), which brings to mind the spiritual element associated with nature.

Wordsworth attempts to showcase the beauty of nature by using figurative language such as the personification of the sea, who shows her bosom, to depict the picturesque scene of the moon shining on the open sea. He also uses personification in describing the howling winds, for much of the same effect. The “sleeping flowers” (1107.7) is also an example of personification in the poem. The quiet and drowsy flowers represent the peace and tranquility of nature, something people of this new modern age have seemed to forgotten. There are also allusions to the Greek mythological sea gods of Proteus and Triton. Wordsworth uses this to reminisce about a time when people were so attuned to nature that they worshiped it as a god. Wordsworth states that this is the better way to live life than to be caught up in the whirlwind of technology.

The poem is arranged as a Petrachan sonnet, broken into an octave and sestet with an abbaabba and cdcdcd rhyme schemes respectively. It is also written in iambic pentameter. This gives the poem a melodic sound, almost like a song, which further accentuates the beauty of nature by the beautiful sound the poem itself creates.

The main theme of the poem is that people have become so consumed by objects and wealth and material needs that they are out of touch with nature, which is the most beautiful thing the world has to offer. Wordsworth wrote this to criticize these materialistic wants and show his disgust in society at the time. He also wrote this to criticize the Industrial Revolution, as well as the Enlightenment, and portray the flaws of these new philosophies and ways of thinking. He sees his fellow citizens becoming more like robots that are enslaved to the new scientific technology and way of life, something that greatly frustrates him when he views all the beauty that nature has to offer. One of the major ways Wordsworth exemplifies this theme is by presenting the idea that he would rather be Pagan. This is an extremely dramatic statement as he wrote this in a very Christian England. His use of “Great God” (1107.9) after saying he’d rather be Pagan further shows the severity of his statement. The reason he states he would rather be a Pagan is because then he would be worshipping gods like Proteus and Triton, who stand for elements of nature.

Throughout the poem Wordsworth is very angry and critical towards society at the time. By the end of the poem he stares out at the sea from a “pleasant lea” (1107.11) thinking he views the gods Proteus and Triton. He portrays himself as happy at this point, but in reality it is a false happiness as the reader is saddened by the fact that Wordsworth has given up on his fellow countrymen. Instead of facing the dismal reality, Wordsworth would rather stay in this illusion to enjoy nature as he believes it is to be perceived, echoing the theme of the poem that humans need to return into communion with nature.

Works Cited

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